

# **DNREC urges motorists to watch out for deer crossing roadways, especially at dusk**

DOVER – With shorter days ahead – especially after the change Nov. 6 from Daylight Savings back to Standard Time – and more 9-to-5 workers driving home at dusk, DNREC's Division of Fish & Wildlife reminds all Delaware motorists to be alert for deer crossing roadways.

“At the end of our work day, as we're heading home, deer are just beginning their peak movement time,” said Emily Boyd, Division of Fish & Wildlife deer biologist. “From dusk to midnight and within a few hours of sunrise are when motorists need to be especially alert and watch for deer on the road.”

The average white-tailed deer in Delaware weighs about 130 pounds, with larger bucks tipping the scales at 180 pounds or more. Hitting an animal that size can do serious and expensive damage to your vehicle – not to mention that such a collision may also cause injury to you and your passengers or trigger an accident involving you and other motorists.

In 2015, Delaware police departments logged a statewide total of 1,791 deer-vehicle crashes – a 5.4 percent increase from 1,699 in 2014. Crashes reported in 2015 resulted in two fatalities, 63 personal injuries and 1,726 property damage cases. Through September, 984 deer-related crashes had been reported, with no fatalities, 35 personal injuries and 949 property damage cases. So far in October, Delaware motorists have been involved in 166 deer-vehicle crashes reported to police, with the highest number of collisions expected in November.

“Fall is mating season for deer, also known as the ‘rut.’ In Delaware, the rut usually begins in early November,” Boyd

said. "Because of this, deer are more active, with bucks single-mindedly pursuing does – sometimes right into the path of your car."

National statistics also show that at least half of all deer-vehicle collisions occur during October, November and December, with the highest number of deer struck on the roadways in November followed by October. DelDOT removed 1,289 deer from Delaware's roadways in 2015 – an increase from 847 in 2014.

Many more crashes may have gone unreported to the police or were reported only to insurance companies. State Farm Insurance recently reported that motorists made more than 4,900 deer/vehicle collision insurance claims in Delaware between July 1, 2015 and June 30, 2016, compared to 5,113 during the same time period in 2014-2015. Delaware ranks 28th this year out of the 41 states in State Farm's annual report on deer-vehicle collisions are most likely to occur. Delaware is considered a medium-risk state with a 1-in-148 chance of a collision, compared to the national average of 1 in 164. Average property damage claims in deer-vehicle collisions run \$3,995.

"Through management actions to balance deer numbers with available natural habitat and public acceptance, Delaware's deer population has stabilized and may be showing signs of decreasing to more sustainable levels. However, there are still numerous areas in the state that have excessive deer populations," said Joe Rogerson, Division of Fish & Wildlife program manager for Species Conservation and Research. "Combine a high deer population with decreasing deer habitat and increased numbers of commuters, and you have a recipe for a high number of deer-vehicle collisions."

Attentive driving is the best way to avoid deer collisions. Keep these tips in mind, as suggested by the Delaware Office of Highway Safety, Delaware police agencies, auto insurance

companies and the Division of Fish & Wildlife:

- Turn your headlights on at dawn and dusk and keep your eyes on the road, scanning the sides of the road as well as what's ahead of you. When there is no oncoming traffic, switch to high beams to better reflect the eyes of deer on or near the roadway. To reduce your risk of injury in a collision, always wear your seatbelt.
- Be especially aware of any distractions that might take your eyes off the road, even if only momentarily, such as cell phones, adjusting the radio, eating or passenger activities.
- Watch for "Deer Crossing" signs that mark commonly-traveled areas, and be aware that deer typically cross between areas of cover, such as woods or where roads divide agricultural fields from woods.
- If you see a deer crossing the road ahead, slow down immediately and proceed with caution until you are past the crossing point. Deer usually travel in groups, so if you see one deer, there are likely to be others.
- Slow down and blow your horn with one long blast to frighten deer away. Do not rely on devices such as deer whistles, deer fences and reflectors to deter deer, as these devices have not been proven to reduce deer-vehicle collisions.
- Do not swerve to miss a deer – brake and stay in your lane. Losing control of your vehicle, crossing into another lane, hitting an oncoming vehicle or leaving the roadway and hitting another obstacle such as a tree or a pole is likely to be much more serious than hitting a deer.
- If you hit a deer, stop at the scene, get your car off the road if possible and call police. Do not touch the animal or get too close.

"A frightened and wounded deer can cause serious injury to a

well-meaning person trying to 'help.' You could be bitten, kicked or even gored by a buck's antlers. It's safer to keep your distance and wait for authorities to arrive," said Boyd.

Anyone who would like to take possession of a deer killed on the road can obtain a vehicle-killed deer tag from DNREC's Division of Fish & Wildlife Natural Resources Police, or other police agencies throughout the state. For information, contact Fish & Wildlife Natural Resources Police at 302-739-9913.

For more information about white-tailed deer in Delaware, contact the Wildlife Section at 302-739-9912. For Delaware State Police information, contact Sgt. Richard Bratz, 302-242-5456.

Follow DNREC's Division of Fish & Wildlife on Facebook, [www.facebook.com/DelawareFishWildlife](http://www.facebook.com/DelawareFishWildlife).

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